

## Challenges of teaching large classes at UNAM: A Case of Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus

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### Abstract

*This article is part of a thesis study that sought to investigate challenges experienced in teaching large classes at UNAM, Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus. Lecturing in large classes can be of grave concern to anyone because of the various challenges involved. Employing a qualitative case study design, this article explores the challenges experienced by lecturers and student teachers in large classes. The participants for the study were three teacher educators who teach classes with one hundred students or more, nineteen student teachers and three campus management members. Data were collected through face- to- face semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Data were analysed through means of thematic and content analysis. The results revealed that large class sizes hinder implementation of active teaching approaches and strategies, impact negatively on the learning activities, assessment tasks and feedback given to student teachers. Among others, the article recommends provision of appropriate resources in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment for large classes. It also recommends that teacher educators should be provided with*

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*continuous professional development programmes in how they could handle large classes as well as various assessment strategies that they could use in such classes.*

**Keywords:** *large classes, teaching and learning challenges, teaching strategies, assessment tasks, the University of Namibia*

## **BACKGROUND**

Large classes at universities have become familiar worldwide, especially in developing countries where tertiary education and access are considered important elements for national development. Upon the establishment of University of Namibia (UNAM) in 1992, the enrolment was 1, 200. It increased to 3, 751 in 1999 and to 17, 500 by 2013 (Ihemba, 2013). From the above figures, it is evident that enrolment numbers in higher institutions of learning are steadily increasing over the years. There are various reasons for the increase in enrolment at UNAM. First is the Namibian government's goal of achieving Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is a strategic plan adopted by the Namibian government in 2004 (Republic of Namibia, 2004), which clearly states that education is one of the driving forces for realising the objectives of Vision 2030. In response to the call of Vision 2030, the Namibian government also came up with the Education Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) policy in 2005. The main purpose of ETSIP was to strengthen the supply of middle to high level skilled labour force to meet the national development goals (Republic of Namibia, 2017).

It is crucial that student teachers be trained in ways that coach them to be effective teachers. Darling-Hammond (1999) makes it clear that for prospective teachers to learn active, hands-on

and minds-on teaching, they must have experienced it for themselves. However, traditional lectures are still common in much of higher education institutions in developing countries like Namibia. In addition to this, the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Namibia (2006) expects Namibian graduating teachers to be at a higher level of preparedness and functionality when they enter the nation's classrooms. That preparedness could be shown when "teachers are able to demonstrate a range of techniques such as role-plays, case studies, experimentation and practical work, problem-solving, group discussions, group study, action research, projects" (p. 43). The University of Namibia's Teaching and Learning Policy is in support of this idea by indicating that one of its aims is to: "promote self-education or notional learning, inquiry based learning, problem based learning as well as innovative teaching" (p. 6).

The context in which students at HPC learn cannot be viewed as ideal. Facilities are inadequate and the carrying capacity of classes cannot sustain the increasing number of students (The University of Namibia, 2012). The students learn in large class groups whereby it is difficult for the teacher educators to model good practice for the student teachers due to a higher number of students in class. The University of Namibia (2012) further indicates through a self- evaluation report that budgetary constraints have a great impact on the tasks of the university and the quality of service delivery. From the preliminary talks with the teacher educators and students at HPC, and from the researcher's own experience as an educator in one of the former teachers training colleges and presently a teacher educator at one of UNAM's new satellite campuses; it is clear that many teacher educators complain of large numbers in classes making it difficult to work professionally. Furthermore, based on her experience as a teacher educator in Namibia, the

first author of this article is aware of a general and personal reflection of teacher educators' experiences with teaching large classes at undergraduate level at the University of Namibia's main campus. On large classes, Lipinge (2013) argued that there is a need for the teacher educators at UNAM to share their teaching practices and experiences in order to identify both short and long term solutions to challenges related to the teaching in large classes. Further, Ayaya (2001) in her study on UNAM's main campus large classes recommended an investigation of instructional modes used in large classes. This is the gap of knowledge that this study is trying to fill and contribute to literature on the instructional strategies employed in large classes as well as the challenges experienced by both teacher educators and students in Namibian higher education

Various institutions and situations give different definitions of what they consider as a large class. Garg, Lee, Anderson, Eytayo and Ayo (2008) make it clear that the basis on which a large class definition is made is very important. They define large class for their study as theory classes with 100 or more students. Davis and McLeod quoted in Biggs (2003, p. 104) define large classes as having 40 students or more because "it is at this point that the close contact with students cannot be managed and students feel anonymous". Additionally, Greyling, Kara, Makka, and van Niekerk (2008) define a large class as a class that has more than 60 students. In the context of this study, the researcher defines a large class as a class that has 100 students or more. The first reason for choosing this definition is because the researcher feels that when students are 100 or more in one class it is more challenging to involve them actively in the lesson. When a certain class has a 100 or more students, then, they are placed in lecture halls or in the assembly or dining halls which can accommodate them. In addition, Ayaya (2001) in her study on large classes at UNAM

main campus also defined large classes as classes that have 100 or more students and recommended for classes at the Faculty of Education to be reduced to less than 80 students. However, the numbers of students per class continue to increase' Furthermore, most classrooms at Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus accommodate less than 100 students. When a certain class has a 100 or more students, then, they are placed in lecture halls or in the assembly or dining halls which can accommodate them. The overall purpose of this study was to explore how the teacher educators facilitate the teaching and learning process in large classes by investigating the instructional strategies employed and the challenges experienced by teacher educators at the University of Namibia, specifically at HPC.

This article is part of a thesis study that sought to investigate challenges experienced in teaching large classes at UNAM, Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus. The main research question that guided the study was: How do teacher educators facilitate the teaching and learning process for prospective teachers in large classes at Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus of the University of Namibia? The sub-questions under this key question were as follows:

1. What instructional strategies are used by the teacher educators in large classes?
2. What are the challenges associated with the use of those instructional strategies?
3. What challenges do the student teachers face as a result of the strategies used by the teacher educators?
4. How can the challenges faced by the teacher educators and student teachers in the teaching and learning process in large classes be addressed?

The section that follows explains the theoretical framework that guided the study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by the social constructivism theory and the Five Es model of instruction. According to Ismat (1998) “constructivism is an epistemology, a learning or meaning making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn” (p. 2). Exploring constructivism as a learning theory may reveal insights into instructional strategies that can help lecturers to better understand constructivism as pedagogy. Richardson (1997) also indicates that constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning that explains the way people learn or develop and not the way people should learn. Dewey (1944) also contributed to constructivism theory and noted that education is a social process. As such Dewey asserted that learning should involve the learners’ previous experiences, and teachers should act as facilitators. All these ideas drive towards the same fact that the teachers’ role in a constructivist classroom is to provide a learning environment which is conducive to help the students to explore their learning process through working together with other students, and through their own personal experiences.

The Five Es is an instructional model based on the constructivist approach to learning (Bybee, Taylor, Gardner, Van Scotter, Powell, Westbrook & Landes, 2006). The researcher used social constructivism as a learning theory in connection with the instructional strategies or teaching approaches. In terms of teacher education in university large classes, the focus was on teacher-centred instruction, learner-centred instruction and how learning can be organized and managed. Ergin (2012) indicates that there are five phases of

the Five Es instructional model namely: engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate. Further, the Five Es instructional model begins with the students' prior knowledge and the new ideas that relate to the current knowledge. The model aids the teacher to structure learning experiences for the students in a systematic way. The researchers believe that while students bring various experiences to class, the teacher educators need to guide the students to build the new information using their previous knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD is appropriate for the study since the teacher educators need to be aware of the tasks that students can perform on their own and the ones that they need assistance of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO is someone who is perceived to have better skills or understanding of a task or process (Schuck, 2012). In this study, the MKO was the teacher educator who is supposed to facilitate the teaching and learning process in large classes. While learners and students bring various experiences to class, teacher educators need to guide the students to build the new information using their previous knowledge. Vygotsky's ZPD is appropriate for the study since teacher educators need to be aware of the tasks that students can perform on their own and the ones that they need assistance of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Review of literature suggests that teachers or lecturers of large classes experience problems in getting their students actively involved in the learning process. Jungic, Kent and Menz (2006) investigated the challenges encountered when teaching large classes. Jungic et al (2006) give full names and date. commented that difficulties to manage students in a large class are due to the failure to see students who raise their hands

through a mass of people and overcrowded venues which makes it difficult for the lecturers to move around. A study conducted at the University of North Carolina (2012) to review the organizational and pedagogical challenges of large classes, identified some of the challenges as difficulties in engaging all students in active learning and in discussions. In another study, the University of Queensland (2001) carried out a project to identify and disseminate the best practices for teaching large classes. The results indicated that the major issues faced by lecturers of large classes were similar. These are issues such as difficulties in engaging students' interests and maintaining attention of the back rows during the lectures.

Hasan (2012), Yazedjian and Kolkhorst (2007) and Hornsby (2013) in identifying strategies to make large classes as effective as small classes, found that lecturers worried about the inability to promote student engagement through interaction. The review of published research indicates that both students and instructors showed that large class sizes constrain small groups, and individual students do not receive adequate attention from the instructor (Hasan, 2012; Yazadijan et al, 2007; Hornsby, 2013 & Al-Jarf, 2006).

Management challenges in large classes are defined by Senekane (2010, p. 10) as "the problems associated with the organization of classes for instruction". While Bamba (2010) describes classroom management difficulties as the difficulty in maintaining order in the class and organising the teaching and learning process. Senekane (2010) explored the strategies employed in large English secondary school classes. The results indicated management challenges as the inability to remember and use students' names, problems in managing students' behavioural problems, the use of cell phones in class and the ineffectiveness of group work. Al-Jarf (2006, p. 24)



concur with the same sentiment by indicating that “large class size inhibits small group activities and individualised instruction, because of the noise level and lack of space in the classroom”. In the same vein, Kajander (2006) indicated that most students found working in groups as an initial challenge in large classes. Interestingly, various researchers have also shown that it is difficult for the lecturer to ensure that all students in a large class have followed the instructions due to the noise level, absenteeism, students entering and exiting the lecture room after the lesson has started, use of laptops and difficulties in respecting the teacher/lecturer and fellow students (Hogan & Daniel, 2012; Hasan 2012; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010 and Jungic, Kent & Menz, 2006).

Nakabugo, Opolot-Okurut, Masembe-Ssbbunga, Maani and Byamugisha (2008) were engaged in a study on large classes in Uganda. Various challenges were identified by Nakabugo et al. (2008) such as lack of teachers and problems with class management and control difficulties. Nakabugo et al. recommended the modification of practical teacher practices, and teacher training programmes to train future teachers in dealing with large class teaching.

In terms of large classes, affective challenges are challenges that result from the teachers/lecturers and students attitudes and perception. The literature reviewed makes the anonymity and interaction problems evident within the affective domain. Senekane (2010) contends that not knowing students' names makes it challenging for the instructors to identify individual interests and knowledge. This in turn makes it difficult for the teacher to provide appropriate and individualized learning and individualized learning activities that suit the variety of students' needs. Also, the instructors' fatigue from teaching large classes can make them less attentive to their duties. Al-Jarf (2006) and

Hogan and Daniel (2012) showed that both students and instructors showed negative attitudes towards teaching and learning in large classes, and indicated the difficulty of establishing student-teacher/lecturer relationship in their studies. Similarly Doran, Healy, McCutcheon and O'Callaghan's (2011) and Asale (2014) studies' results showed that there was little interaction between students in large classes and more interaction in the smaller classes, difficulty to know and distinguish the potential and ability of individual students, lack of individual attention to students and dominance of the lessons by few strong students.

According to Al-Jarf (2006), overcrowded classes have a negative effect on assessment, and instructors should do extra work to be able to assess and evaluate the higher number of students in their large classes. In other studies by Mgeni (2013) and Jimakorn and Singhasiri (2006) it is specified that lecturers believed that it was difficult to give homework and continuous assessment activities in large classes. They felt that the most possible assessment methods for large classes were tests and examinations. Further, Basorun (2013), Hasan (2012), Ipinge (2013), Machika, Troskie-du Bruin and Albertyn (2014) also identified inadequate evaluation of students learning outcomes, pressure on the lecturers to check all their students' work and students waiting too long for assessment marks as some of the assessment challenges in large classes.

Denis (2009) examined the coping strategies in secondary schools in Uganda to mediate teaching in large classes. The problems identified included few instructional materials (e.g. textbooks and mathematical instruments and limited classroom space which make it difficult for the teachers to move around the class and follow up on group discussions. Similarly, Renauld, Tannerbaum and Stantial (2007) investigated

successful techniques for teachers who taught large classes. The results showed that teaching with limited resources in large classes affected the teaching and learning process negatively. It is evident from the above discussion that it is critical to understand students and lecturers' experiences in large classes. This can provide helpful insights that can be of help to the central management of the University of Namibia to plan to support students and lecturers who are involved in large classes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for the study was guided by an interpretivist paradigm utilizing the qualitative approach. The interpretivist paradigm emphasises experience, interpretation, and the subjective understanding of human experience (Cohen and Manion, 2005). The interpretivist paradigm accepts the ontological assumption that reality is not absolute, but socially constructed and that multiple realities exists that are time and context dependent (Mertens, 2010). Chilisa and Preece (2005) share the same sentiment that within this paradigm, reality is limited to context, space, time and individuals or groups in a given situation. This means that in this situation, the researcher tried to understand that the large class phenomena at HPC is a personal and social construct of the teacher educators and student teachers. Hence, each research participant has his or her own reality. In terms of epistemology, interpretivists believe that knowledge is subjective since it is mind-dependent (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). A case study research design was used to collect rich descriptive data with the intention of understanding the challenges experienced by teacher educators and student teachers who deal with large classes at HP campus.

## **Research participants**

The accessible population for the study was all the teacher educators and student teachers at HPC who teach and attend large classes respectively. The sample was drawn from the accessible population. The total number of teacher educators at HPC was 67, and that of student teachers was 1531. However, only the second semester courses were chosen because data were collected during the second semester. The sample was made up of 19 student teachers, three teacher educators who were teaching large classes at the time data was collected, and three teacher educators who were campus management members. In total, there were 25 study participants.

## **Data Collection Tools**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were considered relevant and appropriate to solicit information from the teacher educators. Each teacher educator was interviewed several times periodically. There were two interview sessions with each teacher educator who taught large classes and two interview sessions with each management member. Furthermore, various phone calls and messages were sent to teacher educators for further clarifications. This means that in total, there were six sessions for the three focus group discussions and twelve sessions for teacher educators. Follow up interviews varied in purpose depending on issues that emerged from the first interviews. Individual interviews with teacher educators were audio-recorded with the teacher educators' consent. Focus group interviews were held with student teachers. In this regard, themes like students' experiences of the teaching and learning process, the instructional strategies used and the challenges experienced in large classes were part of the interview guide. Observation helped the researcher to check if the teacher

educators and student teachers do what they say they do during the interviews. The researcher observed quietly the actual behaviour that occurs in large classes in order to see the activities first hand and record the behaviour as it occurred (Merriam, 2001). The observation guide was used to collect the data.

Additionally, some official documents were analysed. These included the university's mission and vision statement, Teaching Workload policy, attendance policy, the courses hand-outs, teacher educators' notes and course outlines, minutes of departmental meetings, campus board meetings and student-lecturers forum meetings, students' assessment tasks such as quizzes and test question papers and the University Faculty of Education 2015 prospectus which describes all the modules and mark sheets with written practical activities and annual reports from various departments.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Permission to conduct this study was sought from the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs of the UNAM and HPC Director. The pilot study was carried out at Rundu campus. After permission was granted, a letter describing how the research will be conducted including conditions of acceptance by the participants was submitted to the authorities.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of the study are presented qualitatively under the themes that emerged from the data. The themes are: inability to give individual attention to student teachers, difficulty for student teachers to ask for clarification, online discussion challenges, inadequate resources, and assessment challenges.

### **Inability to give individual attention to student teachers**

The study revealed that it is very difficult for one teacher educator to pay individual attention to all student teachers in one or two hours scheduled for lessons in a large class. In the process some student teachers may feel left out or ignored. This makes them lose interest in participating in class. This does not contribute positively to the teaching and learning process.

Teacher Educator B expressed: "*There is no chance to give individual attention in large classes because the classes are too large and it is also difficult for the students to present their work individually*". Similarly, Group C, Student 17 expressed: "*Big classes are challenging because I have realised that it is hard for the teacher educator to give attention to all students*". Campus manager teacher educators also cited the lack of individual attention as one of the instructional challenges that student teachers face in large classes.

Lack of individual attention led to lack of interaction with the teacher educator. When teacher educators used teacher-centred or the subject-centred approach, it was difficult for interaction to take place. From lesson observations, it was noted that in Class A which had more than 500 student teachers, the teacher educator mostly presented the information without much interaction with the students, except when most of the student teachers were absent from class as it was observed during the second day of observation. Due to the fact that there was no individual attention, and no interaction in the classroom, some student teachers lost interest in the lessons. As a result, they were not able to answer questions posed by teacher educators.

### **Difficulties for student teachers to ask for clarification**

Teacher educators indicated that when student teachers were given a chance to ask questions, only few of them took the opportunity to do so. The inability to ask questions could be attributed to the fact that student teachers did not understand what was going on in class because they sometimes could not hear or see from the back of the large classes. As a result, they had nothing to ask or give as answers if they were asked questions. At the same time, some of the focus group discussion members indicated that for some students, it was difficult to ask questions in large classes because they were shy and scared to be laughed at by their colleagues when they made mistakes. Teacher Educator A acknowledged by expressing it this way, *“Uhm uhm, if you think of a student who is shy and slow, they are disadvantaged because even if they want to say something or to ask for clarification, they won’t do it.”*

### **Online Discussion challenges**

Discussing with students through online modes of communication was another challenge in large classes. Though student teachers benefited by interacting more with their peers and teacher educator by using online discussions, there were challenges encountered. Challenges experienced with the use of online discussions included; low ICT students’ literacy levels, slow network, dependence on notes and face to face instruction and lack of interest. Teacher Educator B elaborated further that:

*Student teachers found it difficult to understand why online discussion should take place if it did not happen in other subjects. Furthermore, student teachers replied to comments mostly after a day or two due to lack of resources such as computers, smartphones, and data bundles.*

### **Inadequate resources**

The study identified lack of resources as a contributing factor to challenges encountered in large classes. The specific resource challenges identified by teacher educators and student teachers were lack of enough copies of handouts on specific subject topics, lack of functional microphones or sound systems, lack of space and lack of furniture. At the time the study was conducted, each teacher educator at UNAM was allocated a certain limited amount of copies to make per semester. Therefore, it was difficult for a teacher educator with 500+ student teachers to give handouts to each one of his student teachers. This could mean using up all the number of copies allocated to him and would not be able to make copies for assignment, test and exam papers later on. The problem of resources was reflected by Teacher Educator B: *“Lastly, the material provision,...uhm it is not possible to provide the materials to the students”*.

Moreover, it was observed that some classes with more than 200 student teachers were allocated to the lecture halls that were too small for that number of student teachers. Certainly, if all student teachers in that class came for lessons on a particular day, they could not fit in that venue. One teacher educator indicated that in such cases student teachers had to go and look for chairs somewhere so that they could squeeze themselves somewhere in the full lecture hall. This disturbed the instructional process since there would be a lot of noise and loss of time. This is reflected by Teacher Educator C as she stated; *“Let us for example take the 210 student group, the venue itself is not large enough, it is not conducive, the setup is like a corridor. Only the students at the front and middle can hear”*. Correspondingly, Teacher Educator E expressed; *“The infrastructure itself, we lack space for those classes. Student teachers who came late remained standing and there was no*



*option to help them*". The fact that some student teachers remained standing, made it difficult for them to take part comfortably in what was taking place in class.

The Minutes of the Campus Board meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016 also indicated a great concern on how the lecture halls were falling apart. When the chairs get broken, they are not fixed or repaired. To make it worse, the air conditioners were not functioning. This further made the teaching and learning venues not conducive for the teacher educators and student teachers. The 2015 Annual Report from the Curriculum and Instructions Department also indicates that some facilities were not conducive for bigger groups like the main assembly hall, because it was not constructed for the purpose of being a lecturing venue.

### **Assessment Challenges**

Owing to a high number of students in class, some teacher educators whose lessons were observed were sometimes tempted to ask only short objective questions to make the marking process easier. At times student teachers also felt that individual progress was not taken into consideration, because in most cases they were given group assessment tasks. Group F, Student 19 said, "*When we are in groups, it is difficult for the teacher educator to get a picture of individual students' progress*". Similarly, Group C: Student 14 explained:

*"We find it hard as students to do our work individually, since we do a lot of group discussions. We still have a need for individual activities"*.

This was well reflected in Teacher Educator B's statement that "*When assessing students in groups, it is difficult to realise the growth of individual students*". Evidence from the Early

Childhood and Lower Primary Department Annual Report (2015, p. 29) echoes the same sentiments on group assessment. The report states that; *“It is difficult to do practical work with the student teachers because of the large numbers”*. The 2015 Educational Foundation and Management Annual Report also showed the problem of examination marking scripts as an inconvenience caused by large number of students. From the focus group discussions, it was observed that student teachers had a challenge of not being given assignments in addition to the tests. They felt that they were mostly given tests and quizzes. Group A, Student 3 said: *“I think it is vital for teacher educators to give assignments to student teachers. In most cases, our teacher educator gives two tests that contribute to continuous assessment marks. We need more assignments to improve our performance”*. .

In terms of providing feedback to the students, student teachers indicated that they were mostly provided feedback on practical activities and not on the test. They were given back the marked test scripts but the answers were not discussed. They expressed the need to discuss the correct answers with the teacher educator during the feedback session. The results indicate that Teacher Educator B came up with other ways to provide feedback rather than the contact sessions had with student teachers. This was by using the available educational applications since the subject he taught was about integrated media and technology. On the other hand, Teacher Educators A and C used common ways of giving feedback. For example, explaining the answers to the questions orally after the students had completed the activities, and giving the test and quiz papers back. Feedback was also provided to the student teachers through tutorials or consultation hours. Participants explained that during tutorials the teacher educator followed up on what has been taught during the lesson. Tutorials vary

among institutions, faculties and departments. Some tutorials are strictly sessions where extra help is provided, while some are small classes where more explanations are provided to the students.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Inability to give individual attention**

This study revealed that teacher educators found it challenging to give individual attention to students in large classes. The bigger the class is, the more diverse the student population. This means that there would be students with various learning needs and capabilities which need to be noted and addressed. Large classes however made it almost impossible to identify these needs and help the student teachers accordingly with the result that the learning process was affected negatively. This finding resonates with Al-Jarf (2006), Jimakorn & Singhasiri (2006), Bahanshal (2013) and Machika et al. (2014) findings that students found it difficult to participate in the large classes since no attention was given to them individually. This led to dissatisfaction among student teachers especially the slow ones who needed more attention from the teacher educators. Sometimes these disappointed students can withdraw from the whole teaching-learning process. This dissatisfaction manifested itself in the way that the student teachers were doing other things not related to the lessons such as being on their phones chatting and using their laptops for non-educational purposes. Similarly, Mgeni (2013) reveals that the lecturers who taught large classes at the University of Arusha perceived these two challenges: getting students to participate, and getting students to pay attention. When the students are not paying attention then it is difficult for the teaching and learning process to be effective.

Depriving individual attention to students for whatever reason is not in line with the framework of the social constructivist approach. The uniqueness of each individual student is highly acknowledged in the constructivist pedagogy (Richardson, 2003; Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Hence, it can be detrimental when students are not participating due to lack of individual attention. Through the provision of individual attention, teacher educators could also be able to know their students' strengths and weaknesses in order to provide them with the activities that are within their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, limited individual attention to the students also refutes Straits (2007)'s results that Caillet (pseudonym) was found to be a caring instructor who provided individual attention to students in her large class. She took time to know the individual students and their various learning needs. Strauss (2007) shows that it is possible to provide individual attention to students in large classes. However, this was not found to be the case in this study.

Lack of individual attention to student teachers led to another instructional challenge of lack of interaction between teacher educators and student teachers due to a large number of students in classes. This finding is in line with results from studies by The University of Queensland (2001), Al-Jarf (2006) Tomas et al. (2011), Taylor et al. (2012), Yelkpiere et al. (2012), Saejew (2013) and Kang'the (2015) who noted that it was difficult for interaction between lecturers and students, and offering assistance became difficult. Interaction between the teacher and students is important for a favourable learning environment. Again, Kajander (2006) found that students were experiencing lack of interaction among themselves and with the teachers, before the introduction of specific strategies for large Mathematics classes. Contrary to this finding, Martinez and

Ferguson (2013) & Exeter et al. (2010) found that there was a notable interaction between the students and their course coordinators or teachers. Student engagement in large classes was motivated by the interaction with their teachers.

## **Assessment Challenges**

It was apparent from the findings that assessment in large classes at HPC took place in the form of giving student teachers projects, tests, assignments, online discussion activities and practical activities. However, when tests were given, some teacher educators were tempted to ask only short objective questions in order to make the marking process easier. This is in line with Opolot-Okurut, Nakabugo & Masemba-Ssebbunga (2007) finding that teachers in Uganda gave little work to students in order to make marking easy. However, in such a process some students may end up performing poorly since only one type of questions is availed to them. Students also felt that the individual student progress was not well taken care of due to many group assessment tasks. This finding agrees with Asale (2014) who found that it was difficult for the teachers to know and distinguish the individual potential and performance of their students. Further, some classes were not given any assignments instead, only tests were given to contribute to continuous assessment marks. Asale (2014), Jimakorn and Singhasiri (2006), Hasan (2002) and Yelkpiere (2012) also identified the challenge that it was difficult to give other assessment activities in large classes apart from tests and examinations. However, assignments are also important as tests because they give students a chance to apply what they have learned at their own paces. Hence, student teachers felt the need to be given also assignments. It is very important for the teacher educators to maintain a connection between instructions and assessment, because the

results could direct the instructional strategies used (Huba & Freed, 2000; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Assessment in general aims at finding out what the students have learned which could in turn inform teacher educator's teaching/instructional strategies that would need to be adopted.

### **Difficulties for student teachers to ask questions**

Some student teachers revealed that they were uncomfortable to ask questions in large classes due to shyness. This finding is also supported by Yelkpiere et al. (2012) and Bughio (2013) findings that shy students are unable to ask questions in large classes. It can be argued that the shy student teachers might feel threatened by the large number of other students and that is why they end up keeping quiet though they might be in need of some clarifications from the teacher educator. This finding is in contrast with the constructivist 's ideas because under constructivism theory, the students should express themselves freely and the teacher educator is supposed to encourage student inquiry by asking thoughtful questions and by encouraging students to ask questions (Brooks and Brooks, 1993).

### **CONCLUSION**

The study has revealed that generally, large classes hinder the implementation of constructivist instructional strategies. They also impact negatively on classroom management and control. Teacher educators are well aware of the various instructional strategies that they can employ to actively engage student teachers. However, it becomes a challenge when they are responsible for an overwhelming number of students. Teacher educators and student teachers have tried their level best to cope in large classes despite the challenges. Hence, it is obvious that it is not impossible for student teachers to be

actively involved in the teaching and learning process in large classes; however it is challenging

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The responsibility to provide valuable teaching and learning experience in large classes highly depend on hard work, dedication, self- inventiveness, and the availability of resources. There is a need for the provision of resources necessary in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment for large classes. The resources include the construction of more lecture halls, the provision of public address system in all lecturing venues allocated to large classes, chairs, and computers in the computer labs. It is important for UNAM management to employ more teacher educators to manage the teaching load. Teacher educators would be able to teach small classes which would ensure efficient teaching and learning.

It is important for teacher educators who teach large classes to have opportunities to share their experiences in order to learn from each other. This can be done through self-initiated meetings, team teaching (whenever possible) and continuous professional development programmes. Furthermore, there is a need for teacher educators to be provided with continuous professional development programmes in how they could handle large classes since they were not exposed to this in their initial teacher training programmes. Through such programmes, they could also be trained in how to assess large classes. Teacher educators also need to use various assessment strategies and not just stick to giving tests and exams. By assessing student teachers in various ways, various learning needs will be catered for. Stronger emphasis should be put on the increased use of technology. The use of technology can help in uploading learning materials online even before classes, in conducting online discussions, and in communicating with

student teachers even after lessons. Student teachers also need to realise and know that they are matured. When they realise this, they will act and behave in a mature way and not disrupt the lessons.

It is recommended that similar studies be carried out at other teacher training satellite campuses to shed more light on the challenges experienced in teaching large classes and how they could be overcome. Such studies could focus on the teaching of specific modules or subjects offered to large classes.



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